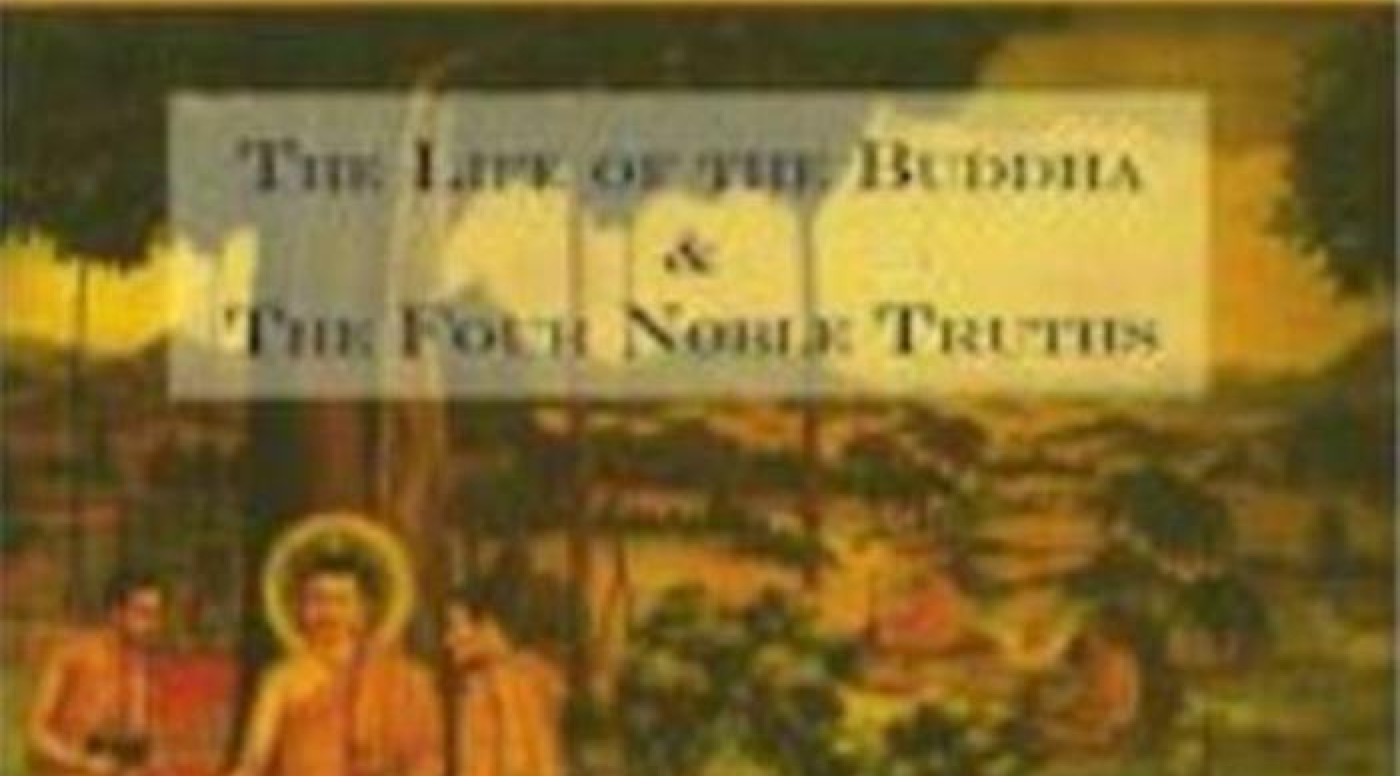
Ocean of Dharma Series

The Life of the Buddha & The Four Noble Truths



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This booklet is part of the series on
The Basic Teachings of Buddhism

The Life of the Buddha and the Four Noble Truths

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Notes

The teaching on the Life of the Buddha and the Three Vehicles came from Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Development of Buddhism in India* and the teaching on the *Four Noble Truths* came from Thrangu Rinpoche's book *The Three Vehicles of Buddhist Practice.*

Technical terms have been italicized the first time they are used to alert the reader that they may be found in the Glossary. Tibetan words are given as they are pronounced, not spelled in Tibetan.

We use the convention of B.C.E. (Before Common Era) for B.C. and C.E. (Common Era) for A. D.



The Buddha

When the Buddha was asked how he knew he was enlightened, he touched the earth in this position and said "as the earth is my witness."

A human being is part of the whole, called by us the Universe, a part limited in time and space. He expresses himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and affection for a few persons near us.

Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of concern to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature for its beauty.

-- *Albert Einstein*

"Although I have shown the means of liberation, you must know that it depends upon you alone."

-- *The Buddha*

Chapter 1

The Life of the Buddha

The story of how Buddhism developed in India begins, of course, with the story of Buddha Shakyamuni who is the guide for all Buddhists. The Buddha was born in India and we should not make the mistake of believing that since the Buddha was born in India, he was a typical Indian and taught in a typically Indian style. The Buddha was born for a very special purpose. He came to this world in order to help and teach the whole of mankind and also all other sentient beings the path that leads to happiness.

Examining the main religions of the world, one will find that all the great teachers, whether Christian, Muslim, or Buddhists, were very special people. They all had an extremely pure motivation and the purest aspiration to help other beings. When they came to teach other beings, it wasn't in the way of a military conquest but rather in the form of a teaching that was intended to help beings find happiness. So most of these great teachers gave teachings that remain even today while military empires have come and gone by the hundreds. One may wonder why those teachings spread so widely and why they are still around today. The reason is that these teachers had a very pure motivation to help others from the very beginning. They were true, pure paths that could lead to happiness.

The Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings have been practiced for 2,500 years, and considering the history of people who practiced Buddhism, we will find that the teachings generated little suffering and few problems or difficulties. On the contrary, a great number of people were able to find true happiness through the practice of the Buddhist path and many found peace and liberation through these teachings.

THE TWELVE DEEDS OF THE BUDDHA

There are very many great deeds of the Buddha recorded but these can be summarized into the twelve most important, most famous

deeds. The first of these twelve deeds was when the Buddha was teaching in the paradise of *Tushita* which is in the *god realm*.[2] While the Buddha was teaching there, the sound of his previous motivation reminded him that it was necessary to take birth in our world and teach the *dharma*. He then considered five things: the land where he ought to be born (Kapila), the caste he should be born into (royal), the family in which he should be born (the Shakya clan), who his mother was to be (Mayadevi), and the time that was right for him to be born (when the five degenerations were on the increase). After having made these determinations, he decided to leave the Tushita paradise and take birth in our world. This particular deed of leaving Tushita to be born had a special significance. It was intended to teach us that somebody who has achieved enlightenment is no longer a slave of his own *karma* and has control over anything he or she does. So the Buddha chose to take birth in our world because the time was right and he wanted to show us that someone who is enlightened has control over anything he or she does.

The second of the twelve great deeds of the Buddha was his birth into the womb of his mother, Mayadevi. So first he entered the womb of his mother and was born from his mother's womb. One may wonder why he took such a birth. If he had complete control over everything, then why wasn't he born miraculously from a lotus flower as was *Padmasambhava* or why done he simply descend from the sky? But he had a special reason for being born in the normal way. If he had been born miraculously from a lotus, for example, it would have been very impressive and attracted many people. However, the Buddha was thinking in the long term of his future disciples who would feel that it was his future disciples who would be inspired because the Buddha who practiced and achieved enlightenment started out like ourselves. Had he been born in a lotus they would have thought no ordinary human beings could reach enlightenment because they didn't have these same miraculous powers. So the Buddha took birth in a womb to show that even ordinary human beings can achieve the highest realization. He did this to instill conviction and confidence in his future disciples.

The third special deed of the Buddha was his birth in the garden in Lumbini (in present day Nepal). Although the Buddha took an ordinary human birth, there was still something very special in his birth. The Buddha came out of the body of his mother through her right side. Some people might wonder how

this was possible. They might think, "Well, what exactly happened? Did the rib cage crack?" One doesn't need to think in terms of anatomical problems because the Buddha was a miraculous being and he just took birth through his mother's right side.

At the time of the Buddha's birth, there were many very special things happening where he was born. All of a sudden, some crops started growing. Trees appeared all over the area of Lumbini and rare flowers such as the Udumbara flower that had never grown in this area started blooming everywhere. From that moment onwards he was given the name Siddhartha in Sanskrit, or *Tungye Drup* in Tibetan, which means, "the one that makes everything possible." As a result of interdependent origination, the presence of a high being, especially his or her birth, produces changes in the environment such as the blossoming of flowers.

A few years later when the Buddha had grown up a little, he trained in arts and crafts and sciences and thus became very knowledgeable, very scholarly, and very skillful. This was his fourth deed and this may be a little surprising, because the Buddha was already enlightened or at least a great *bodhisattva* residing in the tenth *bodhisattva level* (Skt. *bhumi*).[3] It should not have been necessary for him to train in worldly skills because he should have known them naturally. However, there was again a specific reason for doing this. It was to counteract various misconceptions we might have had. One misunderstanding was to think that the Buddha was someone who was simply a meditator without any academic education. Another was the idea that he already possessed all this knowledge so he didn't need to learn. This could give rise to concerns that if we humans tried to learn something it would lead to no results. Or again people might think that the Buddha did not have any qualities and that he never had to train. So to overcome these misconceptions the Buddha worked at becoming a scholar and became very skilled in all different arts. It also shows that it is necessary to receive full education in the culture in which we are born. We must be fully at one with various positive aspects of our culture to be able to become a vehicle for transmitting the dharma.

The fifth deed of the Buddha was to marry, have a child, and enjoy the company of his queen Yashodhara and consorts and all the pleasures of royalty. The Buddha did this so that his future disciples wouldn't think that the Buddha or an enlightened person was unable to enjoy any pleasures or feel the need for enjoyment. The other reason for the Buddha living such a sensuous life was to

show that even though the Buddha had all the finest pleasures, he wasn't satisfied by these pleasures because he had understood that there was a higher form of happiness to be sought.

The sixth deed of the Buddha was his renunciation. The palace was enclosed with high walls and four gates facing each of the cardinal points. The Buddha went for a walk outside of the precincts of the palace, each time leaving through one of the different gates, and each time he saw something that gave him a different lesson on life. The first time he went out through the eastern gate of the palace and saw the suffering of an old man, discovering for the first time that all persons experience the degeneration of the body. Another time he left the palace through the southern gate and saw a sick person and discovered the suffering that all persons at one time or another suffer. The next time he went out through the western gate and saw a dead person and discovered the pain of death which all persons must undergo. This hit him hard because he realized that, no matter how rich you are, no matter how powerful you are, no matter how much pleasure and enjoyment you have, there is nothing you can do to run away from the suffering of old age, sickness, and death. He realized that there was no way to avoid these; even a king could not buy his way out of this suffering. No one can run away and hide from this suffering. No one can fight and defeat these three kinds of suffering.

But then the Buddha realized that maybe there is a way out: the practice of a spiritual path. The Buddha understood this when he left the palace through the northern gate and saw a monk. That moment he felt great weariness with the world and renounced the world at the age of 29.

After the Buddha had these visions, he gave up the kingdom and left the life of a prince, which is his seventh deed. He led a life of austerities for six years by the banks of the Nilajana river in India. These austerities did not lead to his enlightenment, but the years spent doing ascetic practices were not wasted because they had the specific purpose of showing future disciples that the Buddha had put a very great amount of effort and perseverance and diligence into achieving the goal of enlightenment. This seventh deed was also to show that as long as someone is attached to money, food, clothes, and all the pleasures of life, full dedication to spiritual practice is impossible. But if one gives up attachment, then the achievement of Buddhahood becomes a possibility. So

that is why the Buddha engaged in this deed of six years of austerities by a riverside.

The eighth deed of the Buddha was his giving up of the austerities, by accepting a bowl of yogurt and going to the bodhi tree and vowing to stay under this tree until he reached final awakening. In contrast to the austerities, the Buddha ate this nutritious food and gave his body a rest. He puts his clothes back on and went to the bodhi tree. The Buddha gave up the austerities to show his future followers that the main object of Buddhist practice is working with one's mind. We have to eliminate the negativity in our mind and have to develop the positive qualities of knowledge and understanding. This is far more important than what goes on outside of us, so that austerities are not the point in themselves.

What the Buddha wanted to show us is that the true practice should be in the middle of the two extremes of practicing too many austerities and being too indulgent. The first extreme is when you starve yourself or you don't allow yourself food and drink. These practices also involve placing yourself in extreme physical conditions such as being too hot or too cold. This is pointless because it has no true significance. The other extreme is where you just follow any of your desires. This is endless because there is a constant escalation in your desires. If you have ten pleasures, you'll want a hundred. If you have a hundred, you'll want a thousand; so you will never find any satisfaction and you will also never be able to practice the dharma either. So the Buddha wanted to show us that we have to avoid the extreme of too much austerity and too much indulgence and that practice lies somewhere in the middle.

The ninth deed of the Buddha is called "the subduing of the *mara* Papiyan." Papiyan was the leader of the maras. This happened when the Buddha was sitting under the bodhi tree. Papiyan used forms related to the three *disturbing emotions* (sometimes called *kleshas*) of ignorance, desire, and aggression to try to lure the Buddha away from his pursuit of enlightenment.

The first deception representing ignorance was that the Buddha was asked to abandon his meditation and return immediately to the kingdom because his father King Shuddhodana had died and the evil Devadatta had taken over the kingdom. This did not disturb the Buddha's meditation. Then Papiyan tried to create an obstacle using desire by showing him his own beautiful daughters who tried to deceive and seduce him. When this did not disturb the Buddha's meditation Mara then used hatred by coming

towards the Buddha surrounded by millions of horribly frightening warriors who were throwing weapons at the Buddha's body. But the Buddha wasn't distracted or fooled by these three poisons. He remained immersed in compassion and loving-kindness and therefore triumphed over this display of the three poisons and was able to eventually achieve enlightenment.

The tenth deed of the Buddha is his enlightenment which he reached while meditating under the bodhi tree. Because the Buddha had developed all the qualities of meditation to the utmost, he was able to reach enlightenment. He did this to show us that we also can reach enlightenment. As a matter of fact, one of the main points of the whole Buddhist philosophy is to show us that Buddhahood is not something to be found outside of us, but something we can achieve by looking inside ourselves. In the same way as the Buddha Shakyamuni reached enlightenment, we also can achieve enlightenment. And the qualities that we will attain with enlightenment will be no different from the ones the Buddha attained. Also whatever negative emotions the Buddha managed to eliminate.

The eleventh deed of the Buddha occurred when he turned the wheel of the dharma three times, which means when he gave the three great cycles of teachings.[4] When the Buddha lived in India, the population of India believed that if one made offerings and prayed to a god, then that god would be satisfied and happy and in turn that god would grant liberation and happiness. They also believed that if one didn't make offerings and pray to the god, he would be very angry, throwing you down to the hells and inflicting other states of suffering upon you. This idea of a god isn't really one of a special deity, it is only the embodiment of desire and aggression.

But in Buddhism, we do not expect our happiness or our suffering to come from the Buddha. It is not believed that if we please the Buddha, he will bring us happiness and if we displease the Buddha, he will throw us into *samsara* or some lower realm. The possibility of happiness or reaching liberation is entirely up to us. So if we practice the path that leads to liberation, we will attain Buddhahood. But if we do not practice it, then we can't expect to reach enlightenment. The choice is entirely ours. It's in our hands whether we want to find happiness or suffering. But still there is something that comes from the Buddha and this is the path to liberation. To provide us with that means for liberation, the Buddha turned the wheel of the dharma.

The twelfth deed of the Buddha is his passing away at the age of 83 in the town of Kushingara. He asked his students if they had any final questions and then lying in the "*lion's posture*" he passed away. His last words were, "Bhikshus, never forget: Decay is inherent in all composite things."

The Literature of Buddhism

The Literature of Buddhism is enormous with the teachings of the Buddha being about 30 times longer than the Christian Bible. The Buddha's teachings differ from the Christian, Moslem, or Hindu scriptures in the Buddha never suggested that one should worship a god. Instead the Buddhist teachings are concerned with leading an ethical life, analyzing one's existence to develop some meaning to it, developing an inner peace through meditation, and developing boundless compassion and love for others.

The Buddhist teachings can be broadly categorized into three different sets of "vehicles." Thrangu Rinpoche's Three Vehicles of Buddhist Practice is a comprehensive summary of this topic.

After the Buddha passed away, his disciples got together and recited all of his teachings and did so for about 200 years when the teachings were taken to Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka) by Ashoka's son Mahendra and written down in Pali, a language spoken by the Buddha. Through a great effort these teachings have been translated into English by the Pali Text Society.

The literature of the Mahayana vehicle was written mostly at the great Buddhist Universities in Sanskrit in Northern India. This literature is associated with two important persons—Nagarjuna who, briefly, wrote many very scholarly treatises proving that everything is empty and Asanga who brought the five works of the Maitreya Buddha to humans. These works were commentaries on certain sutras and these commentaries are actually studied extensively in Tibetan monasteries rather than the original sutras. These include the *Uttaratantra* which is a detailed treatise on Buddha-essence which all sentient being possess and this essence allows them to achieve enlightenment. Almost all of this literature was lost in India, but was preserved and translated into Tibetan and Chinese. Thrangu Rinpoche has written commentaries on four of these five works of Maitreya.

Finally there is the literature of the Vajrayana literature which consists of the techniques for directly looking at mind (the Mahamudra and the Dzogchen Practices) and the Deity or Yidam practices. Rinpoche has summarized the Mahamudra with his booklet *Introduction to Mahamudra Practice.*

Chapter 2

The Four Noble Truths

When the Buddha taught, he was not teaching as a great scholar who wanted to demonstrate a particular philosophical point of view or to teach for its own sake. His desire was to present the very essence of the deep and vast teachings of Buddhism, and for that reason he gave teachings which suited the varying abilities of his disciples. All the teachings he gave, some long and some short, were a direct and appropriate response to the development of the disciples who came to listen to him. Of course, people have very different capacities and different levels of understanding. They also have very different wishes and desires to learn and understand the dharma. If the Buddha had taught only the very essence of his own understanding of those vast and far-reaching teachings, then, apart from a small number of disciples who had great intelligence and diligence, few people would have ever understood the Buddhist teachings. The Buddha taught whatever would enable a person to develop so he or she could progress gradually towards the very deep and vast teachings. When we analyze all the Buddha's teachings, we see that they fall into three main approaches or vehicles.

The Buddha's teachings helped each student in a way appropriate for his or her level. On the *relative level*[4] each student received some benefit from what the Buddha taught. On the *absolute level*, all of the Buddha's teachings have the same goal. When one analyzes the Buddha's teachings on the relative level, one finds that there are three levels. But, when one examines them from the absolute level, one sees there is only one level, or *yana*, because all beings are directed towards the same goal.

THE HINAYANA

Of the three vehicles or yanas in Sanskrit, the first is the *Hinayana*. Hinayana literally means "lesser vehicle," but this term should in no way be a reproach or be construed to any way diminish the importance of the teachings. In fact, the teachings of the Hinayana

are very important because they suit the capacities and development of a great number of students. If it weren't for these teachings, which are particularly appropriate for those who have limited wisdom or diligence, many persons would never be able to travel the *Mahayana* path. Without the Hinayana teachings there would be no way for practitioners to progress in the dharma, because they would have never entered the path. The path is similar to a staircase: the lower step is the lower step. This doesn't mean it is not important or should be ignored, because without this lower step one can never reach the top of the stairs. One can never gain access to the upper stories of a building without that lower step. It is very necessary. It should be very clear that this term "lesser" vehicle is in no way a pejorative term. It just puts the path into a realistic context.

The fundamental teachings of the Hinayana are the main subject matter of the first turning of the *wheel of dharma*. These teachings were given mainly in India in the town of Varanasi, which is now called Benares. The main subject matter of these teachings is the *four noble truths.*

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

If the Buddha had taught his disciples principally by using his miraculous abilities and various powers, it would not have been very effective in helping human beings on the path of liberation. The best way to show them that wisdom and liberation was to point out the very truth of things; to point out the way things really are. So this is what he did: he showed the truth through the four noble truths and the two truths (relative and absolute truth). By seeing the way things really are, the students learned how to eliminate their mistakes and their delusions. Eliminating one's mistakes and delusions automatically destroys the causes of one's suffering and hardships. This allows one to progressively reach the state of liberation and great wisdom. That is why the four noble truths and the two truths are the essence of the first teachings of the Buddha.

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH

The first noble truth is the full understanding of suffering. Of course, in an obvious way, people are aware of suffering, knowing when they have unpleasant sensations of hunger, cold, or sickness,

and recognize these as things that they don't like. But the first noble truth includes awareness of all the ramifications of suffering, because it encompasses the very nature and essence of suffering. This includes knowledge of the subtle and the obvious aspects of suffering. The obvious aspect of suffering is immediate pain or difficulty in the moment. Subtle suffering is more difficult to understand, because it begins with happiness. But by its very nature this happiness must change because it can't go on forever. Because it must change into suffering, subtle suffering is the impermanence of pleasure.

For example, when Thrangu Rinpoche went to Bhutan with His Holiness *Karmapa*, he was invited to the palace of the king of Bhutan. When he arrived there, the palace was magnificent, the king's chambers were beautiful, there were many servants who showed complete respect and obedience. But he and Karmapa found that even though there was so much external beauty, the king himself was suffering a great deal mentally and had many difficulties. The king himself said that he was quite relieved that His Holiness had come and emphasized how much the visit meant to him because of the various difficulties with which he had been troubled. This is the subtle aspect of suffering.

We think that a particular situation will give us the most happiness we can ever imagine, but actually, within the situation, there is a tremendous amount of anguish. If we think of those who are really fortunate—those gods or human beings with a very rich and healthy life—it seems as though they have nothing but happiness. It is hard to understand that the very root, the very fiber of what is taking place is suffering, because the situation is subject to change.

What is happiness? By its very nature it can often mean that there will be suffering later on. There is no worldly happiness that lasts for a very long time. Worldly happiness includes an element of change, of built-in suffering. For that reason, the first noble truth of the awareness of suffering refers not just to immediate suffering, but also to the subtle elements of suffering. The Buddha taught the truth of suffering because everything that takes place on a worldly level is a form of suffering.

If we are suffering but are not aware of it, we will never have the motivation to eliminate this suffering and will continue to suffer. When we are aware of suffering, we are able to overcome it. With the more subtle forms of suffering, if we are happy and become aware that the happiness automatically includes the seed of

suffering, then we will be much less inclined to become involved in an attachment to this happiness. We will then think, "Oh, this seems to be happiness, but it has built-in suffering." Then we will want to dissociate from it. The first truth is that one should be aware of suffering and once we have a very clear picture of the nature of suffering, we can really begin to avoid such suffering. Of course, everyone wants to avoid suffering and to emerge from suffering, but to accomplish this we need to be absolutely clear about its nature.

When we become aware that the nature of day-to-day existence is suffering, we don't have to be miserable with the thought that suffering will always be present. Suffering doesn't go on forever, because the Buddha entered the world, gave teachings, and demonstrated clearly what suffering is. He also taught the means by which suffering can be ended and described the state beyond suffering which is liberation. We do not have to endure suffering and can, in fact, be happy. Even though we cannot immediately emerge from suffering by practicing the Buddha's teachings, we can gradually eliminate suffering in this way, and move towards eventual liberation. This fact in itself can make us happy, even before we have actually completely emerged from suffering. Applying the Buddha's teachings, we can both be happy in the relative phase of our progress and then, at the end, we will gain wisdom and liberation and be happy in the ultimate sense, as well.

The first noble truth makes it clear that there is suffering. Once one knows what suffering is, one must eliminate that suffering. It is not a question of eliminating the suffering itself, but of eliminating the causes of suffering. Once one removes the causes of suffering, then automatically the effect, which is suffering, is no longer present. This is why, in order to eliminate this suffering, one becomes aware of the second noble truth, the truth of universal origination.

THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH

The truth of universal origination is an English translation of the name Buddha himself gave to this noble truth. It means "that which is the cause or origin of absolutely everything." The truth of universal origination indicates that the root cause of suffering is negative karma and the kleshas. Karma is a Sanskrit word which means "activity" and klesha in Sanskrit means "mental defilement"

or "mental poison." If one does not understand the Buddha's teachings, one would most likely attribute all happiness and suffering to some external cause. One might think that happiness and suffering come from the environment, or from the gods, and that everything that happens originates in some source outside of one's control. If one believes this, then it is extremely hard, if not impossible, to eliminate suffering and its causes. On the other hand, when one realizes that the experience of suffering is a product of what one has done, that is, a result of one's karma, eliminating suffering becomes possible. Once one is aware of how suffering takes place, then one can begin to remove the causes of suffering. First, one must realize that what one experiences is not dependent on external forces, but on what one has done previously. This is the understanding of karma. Negative karma produces suffering and is driven by the defilements. The term "defilement" refers mainly to one's negative motivation and negative thoughts, which produce negative actions.

THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH

The third noble truth is the cessation of suffering through which it is explained that the causes of karma and the defilements can be removed. We have control over suffering, because karma and the defilements take place within us—we create them, we experience them. For that reason we don't need to depend on anyone else to remove the cause of suffering. The truth of *interdependent origination* means that if we do unvirtuous actions, we are creating suffering. It also means if we abandon unvirtuous actions, we remove the possibility of experiencing suffering in the future. What we experience is entirely in our hands. Therefore, the Buddha has said that we should give up the causes of negative karma and the defilements. Virtuous actions result in the external state of happiness and unvirtuous actions result in suffering. This idea is not particularly easy to grasp, because one can't see the whole process take place from beginning to end.

There are three kinds of actions: mental, verbal, and physical. These are subdivided into virtuous and unvirtuous physical actions, virtuous and unvirtuous verbal actions, and virtuous and unvirtuous mental actions. If one abandons these three types of unvirtuous actions, then one's actions become automatically virtuous.

There are three unvirtuous physical actions: the harming of life, sexual misconduct, and stealing. The results of these three unvirtuous actions can be observed immediately. For example, when there is a virtuous relationship between a man and woman they care about each other, protect each other, and have a great deal of love and affection for each other, so they will be happy because they look after each other. Their wealth will usually increase, and if they have children, their love and care will bring mutual love in the family. In the ordinary sense, happiness develops out of this deep commitment and bond they have promised to keep. Whereas, when there is an absence of commitment, there is also little care or love, and sexual misconduct arises. This is not the ground out of which love arises, or upon which a nice home can be built in which children can develop happiness. One can readily see that from the lack of commitment to sexual fidelity, many kinds of difficulties will arise.

One can also see the immediate consequences of other unvirtuous physical actions. One can see that those who steal have difficulties and suffer; those who don't steal experience happiness and have a good state of mind. Likewise, those who kill create many problems and unhappiness for themselves, while those who protect life are happy.

The same applies to our speech although it is not so obvious. But on closer examination, we can also see how happiness develops out of virtuous speech and unhappiness from unvirtuous kinds of speech. At first lying may seem to be useful because we might think that one can deceive others through lies and gain some advantage. But *Sakya Pandita* said that this is not true. If we lie to our enemies or persons we don't get along with very well, because they do not like us they are not going to believe us anyway. It will be very hard to deceive them. If they are our friends, we might be able to deceive them at first by telling a lie. But after the first time, they won't trust us any more and may think that we have been a hypocrite. So we see that lying doesn't really work. Then if we look at the opposite, a person who takes pains to speak the truth will develop a reputation of being a truthful person who can be relied on. Out of this trust, many good things will emerge.

Once we have considered the consequences of lying, we can think of similar consequences relating to other kinds of damaging speech: slander and coarse, aggressive, and useless speech. Except for the immediate and the short-term consequences virtuous

speech produces happiness and unvirtuous speech produces suffering.

When we say useless speech, we mean speech that is really useless, not just conversational. If we want someone to relax and feel comfortable it is all right to talk without the conversation having great meaning as long as our intentions are to benefit that person. However, if we just chatter for not reason, that is "useless speech." Worse than that is "chatter rooted in the defilements" when one is saying bad things about other people because of dislike or jealousy of them or when one sets people against each other. When one just gossips about the character of people, that is really useless speech. Besides being useless, this very often causes trouble, because it sets people against each other and causes bad feelings.

The same applies to "harmful speech." If there is really a loving and beneficial reason for scolding, for example, a child when he is doing something dangerous or not studying in school, that is not harmful speech because it is devoid of the defilements. Rather it is a skillful way of helping someone. If there is a genuine, beneficial attitude and love behind what one says, it is not harmful speech. But if speech is related to the defilements such as aggression or jealousy, then it is harmful speech and is something to give up.

We can go on to examine the various states of mind and see that a virtuous mind produces happiness and unvirtuous states of mind create unhappiness. For instance, strong aggression will cause us to lose our friends. Because of our aggressiveness, our enemies will become even worse enemies and the situation will become inflamed. If we are aggressive and hurt others and they have friends, then eventually those friends will also become our enemies. On the other hand, if we wish to benefit others, goodness will come out of it through the power of caring for our loved ones and then through wishing to help them develop goodness. Through this they will become close and helpful friends. Through the power of our love and care, our enemies and people we don't get along with will improve their behavior and those enemies may eventually become friends. If we have companions and wish to benefit others, we can end up with very good friends and all the benefits which that brings. In this way, we can see how cause and effect operate, how a virtuous mind brings about happiness and how a unvirtuous mind brings about suffering and problems.

There are two main aspects of karma: one related to experience and one related to conditioning. The experience of karma has already been discussed. Through unvirtuous physical actions, one will experience problems and unhappiness. Likewise, through unvirtuous speech such as lying, one experiences unhappiness and sorrow. Through unvirtuous states of mind, one also experiences unhappiness. This was demonstrated by the example of an aggressive attitude. All of this is related to the understanding that any unvirtuous activity produces unpleasantness or unhappiness.

The second aspect of karma relates to conditioning. By being unvirtuous with our body, speech, or mind we habituate ourselves to a certain style of behavior. Unvirtuous physical or verbal behaviors add to the habit of doing things. For example, each time we kill, we are conditioned to kill again. If we lie, that increases the habit of lying. An aggressive mind conditions our state of mind so we become more aggressive. In later lives, then, that conditioning will emerge so that we will be reborn with a great tendency to kill, to lie, to engage in sexual misconduct, and so on. These are two aspects to karma. One is the direct consequence of an act and the other is the conditioning that creates a tendency to engage in behavior of that kind. Through these two aspects, karma produces the happiness and the suffering in life.

Even though we may recognize that unvirtuous karma gives rise to suffering and virtuous karma gives rise to happiness, it is hard for us to give up unvirtuous actions and practice virtuous actions because the defilements exercise a powerful influence on us. We realize that suffering is caused by unvirtuous karma, but we can't give up the karma itself. We need to give up the defilements because they are the root of unvirtuous actions. To give up the defilements means to give up unvirtuous actions of body (such as killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct), the unvirtuous actions of speech (such as lying, slander and harmful and useless speech), and the unvirtuous aspects of mind (such as aggressive, covetous, or ignorant mind). Just wanting to give up the defilements does not remove them. However, the Buddha in his great kindness and wisdom has given us a very skillful way to eliminate the very root of all the defilements through the examination of the belief in the existence of self or ego.

We cannot easily understand this belief in a self because it is very deep-rooted. First of all, we have to search for this self that we believe in, and through this search we can discover that the self

does not exist. Then we will be able gradually to eliminate the belief in a self. When this is done, the defilements are also eliminated because with an elimination of the belief in self, unvirtuous karma is also eliminated.

This belief in a self is a mistaken perception. It's an illusion. For example, if one had a flower and were to interrogate one hundred people about it, they would all come to the same conclusion that it is indeed a flower. So one could be pretty sure that it is a flower. But, if one asked a person "Is this me?" he would say, "No, it's you." A second person would say, "It's you." One would end up with one hundred persons who say this as "you" and only oneself would consider it as "me." So statistically one's self is on very wobbly ground.

We also tend to think of "me" as one thing, as a unity. When we examine what we think of as ourselves, we find it is made up of many different components: the various parts of the body, the different organs, and the different elements. There are so many of them, yet we have this feeling of a single thing, which is "me." When we examine any of those components and try to find something that is the essence of self, the self cannot be found in any of these bits and pieces. By contemplating this and working through it very thoroughly, we begin to see how this "I" is really an incorrect perception.

Once we have eliminated this wrong way of thinking, the idea of an "I" becomes easy to get rid of. So, all of the desire rooted in thinking, "I must be made happy," can be eliminated as well as all the aversion rooted in the idea of "this difficulty must be eliminated." Through the elimination of the idea of "I," we can annihilate the defilements. Once the defilements are gone, then unvirtuous karma that is rooted in the defilements can go. Once the unvirtuous karma is gone, suffering will no longer take place. This is why Buddha says that the root of suffering needs to be abandoned.

To summarize, once we recognize what suffering really is, then we begin by removing its causes. We stop doing unvirtuous actions that create suffering. To stop these unvirtuous activities, we dig out their root, which are the defilements and the various unhealthy attitudes. To eradicate the defilements we need to remove their heart, which is the belief in a self. If we do that, then we will eventually come to realize the wisdom of non-self. Through understanding the absence of a self, we no longer create the defilements and negative actions and this brings an end to that

whole process. This outcome is certain, thus this is the third Noble Truth of Cessation.

The very essence and nature of cessation is peace. Sometimes people think of Buddhahood in terms of brilliant insights or something very fantastic. In fact, the peace one obtains from the cessation of everything unhealthy is the deepest happiness, bliss, and well being. Its very nature is lasting, in contrast to worldly happiness, which is exciting for a time, but then changes. In contrast, the ultimate liberation and omniscience of cessation is the most deeply moving peace. Within that peace all the powers of liberation and wisdom are developed. It is a very definitive release from both suffering and its result, and is a definitive release from the defilements, which are the cause of suffering. There are four main qualities of this truth of cessation. First, it is the cessation of suffering. Second, it is peace. Third, it is the deepest liberation and wisdom. Fourth, it is a very definitive release. Cessation is a product of practicing the path shown to us by the Most Perfect One, the Buddha. The actual nature of that path is the topic of the fourth noble truth, which is called the truth of the path, because it describes the path that leads to liberation.

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH

The truth of the path is called "the truth of the path" because a path leads one to the ultimate goal. One does this step by step, stage by stage, progressively completing one's journey. The main stages of Buddhism are called "the five paths" because by progressively traversing them, one eventually reaches one's destination which is cessation. This path of the Buddha can be analyzed through its five main stages which are called the *five paths*. The names of the five paths are the stage of accumulation, the stage of junction, the stage of insight, the stage of cultivation, and the final stage of no more learning. Properly speaking, the first four of these are the path, with the fifth one being the effect.

The first path is called the "path of accumulation" because on this path we accumulate all the positive factors one to progress. We try to cultivate diligence, good qualities, and wisdom which penetrates more deeply into the meaning of things. We commit ourselves to accumulating all the positive aspects of practice. We gather the positive elements into our being while at the same time working on many different ways to remove all the unwanted elements from our life. We also apply various techniques to

eliminate the blockages and obstacles that are holding us back. This is called the stage of accumulation because we engage in this manifold activity and gather all of these new things into our life.

In ordinary life we are caught up in worldliness. Even though we don't want to be, we are still operating on a level of conditioned existence (Skt. *samsara*) because we are still under the influence of the defilements. They have a very strong habitual grip on our existence. We need to get rid of these defilements in order to find our way out of samsara. Of course, we want to find happiness and peace and we know it is possible. But even with the strongest will in the world, we cannot do it overnight. It is like trying to dye a large cloth, in that one needs to bring many different elements together to change the color.

So, first of all, in order to gain good qualities, we need to work on creating all the different conditions which will make those qualities emerge. To develop the various insights of meditation and real wisdom, we need to develop great faith and confidence in the validity and usefulness of that wisdom. Once we are convinced of its value, we need to change our habits so that we have the diligence to do all the things necessary to make insight and wisdom emerge. Therefore, there are many factors and conditions we must generate within our life that will bring about our happiness.

To remove all the unwholesome factors binding us in samsara, we must uproot belief in a self, eliminate the various defilements which are hindering us, and bring together the many different conditions that make this transformation and purification possible. We talk about accumulation because we are assembling all the different conditions for this transformation. We won't be able to progress in a significant manner until we have gathered all these causes and conditions in a proper and completely perfect way within ourselves. For that reason, the purpose of this stage of accumulation is to complete all the necessary conditions by gathering them into our existence.

Eventually, because of the complete gathering of favorable conditions, we will reach the third stage which is the "path of insight." This is the stage during which insight into the way things actually are is developed, beyond the veil of delusion. Linking the path of accumulation and the stage of insight is the second path of junction. Here our inner realization, the very way we can perceive things, begins to link up with the truth of the actual nature of phenomena, because we are gathering all the favorable circumstances that will eventually lead us to the actual insight itself.

When we attain insight into the way things really are and this insight develops beyond the level of delusion and mistaken views, we realize that there is no self. Once there is no longer a belief in self, there are no longer any root defilements of attachment, aggression, or mental darkness associated with the idea of self. Once there are no longer any defilements, one does nothing unvirtuous and has no more suffering.

Now, it is true that once we have that insight, all suffering is immediately removed, but in another way, that is not true. This is because the delusion of self is a habit which has been built up for such a long time and is very, very hard to remove. For example, when we believe in the self and we hit our finger with a hammer, it hurts. Even when we have realized that an unchanging self is just a delusion fabricated by our minds, still when we hit our finger with a hammer it hurts. We still have the feeling, "I am suffering," because there is an enduring built-up association of "I" with the flesh of our body. Removal of that long established conditioning of self is carried out through a long process of accustoming oneself to the truth of non-self. This is the fourth stage of the cultivation of insight.

The fourth stage is called the path of cultivation. The word *gom* is usually translated as "meditation" but actually means "to get used to something" or "to accustom oneself."[5] This is why it is translated here as "the path of cultivation," while other texts translate it as "the path of meditation." But this stage is the idea of getting used to the insight into the nature of things. Through becoming more and more familiar with the truth of things,[6] we can remove the very fine traces of defilements and subconscious conditioning that still exist. Through gradual working on these, the goal of Buddhahood will be attained.

Through the cultivation of insight, we eventually reach the goal of the fifth path that is called "the path of no more learning." Through cultivation, we remove even the most subtle causes of suffering. Once this is completed we have reached the highest state and there are no more new paths to go along making this "the path of no more study" or "the path of no more learning."

Chapter 3

The Three Wheels of Dharma

In the first chapter the twelve deeds of the Buddha were discussed. The eleventh deed of the Buddha was turning the wheel of dharma. What is the actual meaning of this phrase? When we speak of dharma, we usually refer to the teachings given by the Buddha, but in fact dharma has two meanings: one is the scriptural dharma that came down to us from the Buddha and the other is the dharma of realization. Actually, the root of all dharma is realization meaning that one understands the true nature of phenomena just as it is. To obtain such understanding, one has to develop all the good qualities of meditation with much diligence, effort, and perseverance. Through this work in meditation, one comes to a point where a very special understanding, knowledge, and insight never experienced before arises. At this time one reaches the ultimate fruition, true realization. This is what is meant by the dharma of realization. But in order to achieve this realization, we need a foundation to work from. We need to work from the scriptural dharma which is the dharma as a teaching given us by the Buddha.

There are two main classes of scriptural dharma: the teachings of the sutras and the teachings of the *tantras*. The sutras of the Buddha were given in three different waves or turnings of the *wheel of dharma*. The first turning of the wheel of dharma were the *Hinayana* teachings. These teachings were intended for individuals whose mind was not yet very open and had a lesser aspiration to achieve enlightenment.

The second wave of teachings called the second turning of the wheel of dharma are the teachings on *emptiness* and on the Prajnaparamita teachings. These are teachings of the Mahayana.

Finally, the third wave of teachings were the bridge between the sutras and the tantras. These were the teachings in which the Buddha taught that absolutely everyone has *Buddha-nature* or Buddha-essence.

THE SUTRAS

Now the first turning of teachings were given in Varanasi which you can visit in India nowadays. The Buddha taught in the deer park (which is now called Sarnath) which at the time was a very remote and very solitary place.[6] After the Buddha reached his enlightenment, he remained completely silent and didn't teach for seven weeks. The reason for this was to show that the dharma is very rare, very special, very valuable, and this is why the Buddha just remained silent for some time and until he was requested to teach. The request was made by many gods including Brahma.[7] Having had the request to teach, the Buddha went to Varanasi and gave the teachings in the deer park. He gave the teachings to five men who were called "the five good followers"[8] who were connected by previous karma to the Buddha and who through this link, were the first ones to receive his teaching.

The subject matter of this first turning of the wheel of dharma was the teaching of the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha expounding these Four Noble Truths to make it very clear to all those who were going to follow the Buddha's path what the teaching was, why one needed to practice it, and what kind of results one could be expected from the practice. So to clarify the path the Buddha laid it out in a very clear form of the four truths.

He showed that if we don't practice the path of dharma, we will wander on and on in samsara, but if we practice the dharma, we will gain the liberation of *nirvana*. The Buddha first taught that suffering is inherent to samsara and that this is what we must really overcome. Secondly, he taught that the cause of this suffering are the disturbing emotions (or *kleshas*) and karma. To counteract samsara we must engage in the aspect of nirvana which again has two parts. The third noble truth of cessation or peace shows what we can achieve. Nirvana is cessation of suffering. And fourth the way to achieve this is the truth of the path. Since samsara is by nature suffering, we have to go beyond samsara to eliminate samsara. Since nirvana is peace, this is what we have to try to achieve. But achieving nirvana and eliminating samsara can not be done automatically. So it is done through working on the causes of these that we can achieve our goal. This is why the Buddha expounded on the four truths in the form of causes and their effects. The causes of the suffering of samsara are the disturbing

emotions such as lust, anger, and ignorance and karma which need to be overcome. In the same way, the cause of peace and bliss of nirvana is the path which needs to be practiced.

So this is how the Buddha gave the whole outline of his teaching in the form of these four truths. Within each aspect of samsara and nirvana, there is this causal relationship between cause and effect.

This series of teachings which began in Varanasi were called the turning of the first wheel of dharma. Later the Buddha taught the second wheel of dharma at Vulture Peak in Rajagriha, India.[9] The people who were present during this teaching were *arhats* and bodhisattvas in great numbers. The teaching itself was mostly the exposition of the Prajnaparamita. This is when the Buddha gave the teachings on emptiness and on the conduct of a bodhisattva through the teachings on the six *paramitas.*

In the first turning of the wheel of dharma, the Buddha showed that one had to abandon samsara to achieve nirvana. But how is this possible? Does it mean that we have to go on a long journey to where we have never been before to find nirvana? Does it mean that we have to create something new called nirvana? In fact, it doesn't mean that at all. All it means is that we have to understand the actual nature of phenomena[10] that we have to understand that our present view of reality is mistaken, and we have to remove our impurities. And once we see things as they really are, this is when we can achieve Buddhahood.

The third turning of the wheel of dharma is also called the teachings that gave complete clarification. These teachings were given in Shravasti and other places in India in the presence of all the great bodhisattvas. These teaching revealed that Buddha-nature is present in the mind of all beings. We may wonder why this was taught last. The reason is that in the second turning, the Buddha taught that everything was empty of inherent nature. This teaching could lead to the belief that the goal of the Buddhist path—nirvana—is actually simply complete emptiness or annihilation. To avoid this mistake, the Buddha gave this third set of teachings showing that the mind is not just nothingness. When one achieves Buddhahood, the original intrinsic luminosity of the mind becomes manifest. This luminosity or clarity of the mind means that the mind is not a dark, obscure thing by nature, but it has its own inherent, intelligent clarity. Once one has removed the veils, the thick shroud of ignorance, the inherent clarity of the mind, this

brilliance of the intelligence of mind, will shine in its fullness. Once this clarity of the mind has manifest, then one can understand all things of nirvana and samsara very clearly. One has the understanding of phenomena and this knowledge is accompanied by the greatest of bliss and peace.

THE TANTRAS

The three turnings of the wheel of dharma that have just been described correspond to the sutras taught of the Buddha. The Buddha also taught the tantras which are the teachings of the Vajrayana. The Buddha gave four tantras: the *kriya tantras*, the *carya tantras*, the *yoga tantras*, and the *anuttarayoga tantras.*

These teachings were given in many places. Sometimes the Buddha gave these teachings in some of the god realms such as Tushita and some of the teachings were given in physical places in India. Those receiving these teachings were bodhisattvas and *dakas* and *dakinis* practicing the *secret mantas.*[11] The sutras already provided very deep and vast teachings on the nature of phenomena. But with the Vajrayana, the Buddha was able to give people the possibility to achieve the fruition of the Buddhist path very quickly and without major hardships. The Vajrayana can do this by providing special *skillful means* such as the meditation on the *generation stage* and the *completion stage* of a deity,[12] and using meditation techniques of looking at the nature of the mind directly.

So the Buddha turned the wheel of dharma and gave all the various teachings of the Hinayana, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana[11] in different places with different people and at all different times. But also because he was teaching students of vastly different abilities, at times it seemed to them as if the Buddha was mainly spreading the Hinayana; at times it seemed to them as if he was teaching the Mahayana and sometimes as if to the Vajrayana. Of course, this was just a matter of the way in which the people were perceiving the teachings of the Buddha; it seemed to some that the Buddha was giving completely Hinayana teachings and to others that he was giving completely Mahayana teaching. The Buddha could also be somewhere else and through his miraculous powers giving other teachings to others.

Because of this, some people started having the impression that the Buddha had only given the Hinayana teachings, and had not given the Mahayana teachings which were made up by someone else. Others believed that the Buddha had given the

Mahayana teachings, but had not given the Vajrayana teachings and that these Vajrayana teachings had been fabricated by his followers. The belief that the Mahayana and the Vajrayana teachings were created by someone else is based on the belief the Buddha was just an ordinary man with no extraordinary qualities of enlightenment instead of seeing a Buddha as being a very exceptional being who came into the world to help people out of his great compassion and to lead them to liberation. Once one thinks of the Buddha as an ordinary Indian man, then next one will have doubts as to whether he actually gave the various teachings attributed to him and one begins picking and choosing between teachings of the various vehicles.

It is a mistake to identify the Buddha as an ordinary person and to start thinking that maybe the Buddha didn't have complete knowledge, or was not able to teach a complete range of teachings or that the Buddha could have taught in this place, but not in that place. It is not worth entertaining such doubts because the Buddha was not an ordinary person nor was he a god who if pleased with you will send you to heaven and if displeased throw you into the hell realms. But at the same time, saying the Buddha is not a god doesn't mean that we should think of the Buddha as someone devoid of any special qualities of knowledge, intelligence, and understanding or without any special direct intuition and insight. He was indeed a very special being who gave the complete set of dharma teachings which were not in contradiction to each other. Each has its own relevance. Whoever practices a teaching of any level or vehicle properly will be able to achieve the respective result of that particular path. So this was the eleventh deed to the Buddha, the turning of the wheel of dharma.

The twelfth deed of the Buddha was his passing away.[13] The Buddha could have remained in our world for thousands and thousands of years, and this may have been quite beneficial. On the other hand, there would have been the danger that people would start thinking that the Buddha was permanent which could generate all kinds of misconceptions. Instead by passing away, the Buddha showed that if he had to die, then, of course, everybody else would have to also die one day. So it was to make everyone aware of the impermanence of life so that they could generate a sense of renunciation, a sense of urgency in the practice, a sense of weariness with this world. It was also to instill the feeling that dharma, the teachings of the Buddha, is very rare, very precious,

and very valuable. So this is why the Buddha passed away in Kushinagari in India.

Through his twelve deeds, the Buddha was able to help beings in our world extensively, particularly through the teachings of dharma. Why did the Buddha come into our world and act through these twelve deeds? The reason was the very exceptional compassion of the Buddha wanting to help all beings and to lead them onto the path that leads to real happiness. He wanted to show individuals the path to peace, the path to true happiness by teaching the four truths or the two truths that describe the true nature of everything. He showed us that we can have the choice to choose our own happiness and travel on the path that leads to ultimate liberation and happiness. So the Buddha because of his very great love and compassion for all of us, did not keep these teachings to himself, but turned the wheel of dharma.

THE FIRST COUNCIL

After the Buddha passed away, his teachings were preserved without any alteration or without any loss by means of three great councils. The Buddha didn't speak from books that he had written and he didn't write anything down. Instead people came and asked him questions and voiced their doubts and their uncertainties. The Buddha would answer these questions, so that the teaching of the Buddha were actually answers to various people's questions and doubts. These questions would become the opportunity for expounding the truth, for speaking of the true nature of everything.

We may ask, "Well, if everything was just said by the Buddha and nothing was written down, how come things didn't get lost or altered or modified as time went on?" The reason this did not happen was that many of those who were receiving the Buddha's teaching were monks totally dedicated to the path of the Buddha. When they listened to the teaching, they did it with all their heart and immediately put the teachings into practice so they realized the fruition of the path extremely quickly, allowing all the qualities of intelligence to rapidly blossom in them. Among other things, they achieved the power of perfect memory which means each word the Buddha said was engraved very deeply in their memory so that every word was kept in their minds and nothing was lost.

After his passing away one of the Buddha's most important monks named Mahakashyapa gathered 500 arhats for a great council to keep all the teachings in tact. The meeting took place in

the great Banyan cave which was on the bank of hot springs which are quite close to Vulture Peak near Rajagriha. So these 500 arhats gathered there and the meeting was presided over by three of them in particular: Ananda, Mahakashyapa, and Upali. They recited every word of the Buddha that they had heard and each of these three expounded on particular aspect of the teaching of the Buddha. So Upali expounded the Vinaya teachings, Ananda the Sutras, and Mahakashyapa the Abhidharma. They would begin by saying, "Thus have I heard. This is how the Buddha spoke" and then they would recite everything they had heard. In this way, they established very clearly and formally what the Buddha's teachings were, so that from that point onwards all the teachings were classified into these three groups and kept very systematically.

The purpose of this first council was to make sure that all the immaculate words of the Buddha would be preserved in their purity and wouldn't be lost. For instance, if even one part of a sutra had been lost, then the whole teaching of the Buddha would have lost some of its meaning. That is why they wanted to keep everything in tact. But, of course, it is possible that some of us will have doubts about this. We may feel that if there were no books to record the teachings of the Buddha, then maybe the sutras are not complete or maybe some of them have been made up by his followers so it is quite possible that the sutras are not pure teachings at all.[16]

Well, we do not need to entertain that kind of doubt because the arhats were very great beings who respected the Buddha's teaching so deeply, that they wanted to keep the teachings very pure, as they had been delivered originally by the Buddha.

A Brief Biography of Thrangu Rinpoche

Thrangu Rinpoche was born in Kham in 1933. At the age of five he was formally recognized by the Sixteenth Karmapa and the previous Situ Rinpoche as the incarnation of the great Thrangu tulku. Entering Thrangu monastery, from the ages of seven to sixteen he studied reading, writing, grammar, poetry, and astrology, memorized ritual texts, and completed two preliminary retreats. At sixteen under the direction of Khenpo Lodro Rabsel he began the study of the three vehicles of Buddhism while staying in retreat.

At twenty-three he received full ordination from the Karmapa. When he was twenty-seven Rinpoche left Tibet for India at the time of the Chinese military takeover. He was called to Rumtek, Sikkim, where the Karmapa had his seat in exile. At thirty-five he took the geshe examination before 1500 monks at Buxador monastic refugee camp in Bengal, and was awarded the degree of Geshe Lharampa. On his return to Rumtek he was named Abbot of Rumtek monastery and the Nalanda Institute for Higher Buddhist studies at Rumtek. He has been the personal teacher of the four principal Karma Kagyu tulkus: Shamar Rinpoche, Situ Rinpoche, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche and Gyaltsab Rinpoche.

Thrangu Rinpoche has traveled extensively throughout Europe, the Far East and the USA; he is the abbot of Gampo Abbey, Nova Scotia, Canada, of Thrangu House, Oxford, in the UK. In 1984 he spent several months in Tibet where he ordained over 100 monks and nuns and visited several monasteries. He has also founded the monastery, Thrangu Tashi Choling in Bodhnath, a retreat center and college at Namo Buddha, east of the Katmandu Valley, and has established a school in Bodhnath for the general education of lay children and young monks. He built Tara Abbey in Katmandu. In October of 1999 he consecrate the College at Sarnath which will accept students from the different sects of Buddhism and will be available to western students as well.

Thrangu Rinpoche has given teachings in over 25 countries and is especially known for taking complex teachings and making them accessible to Western students. Thrangu Rinpoche is a recognized master of Mahamudra meditation.

More recently, because of his vast knowledge of the dharma, he was appointed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be the personal tutor for the recently escaped 17th Karmapa.

Notes

1. There are several realms which ordinary persons don't perceive. As Thrangu Rinpoche has said, "Because you can't see it, that doesn't mean it doesn't exist." One of these realms is the sambhogakaya which can be visited by only highly realized Bodhisattvas. In this realm the dharma is continually taught. One sambhogakaya realm is Tushita which is presided over by the next Buddha, the Maitreya Buddha. The Buddha dwelled there before coming to earth to give dharma teachings.
2. The Mahayana practitioner is a bodhisattva who vows to not reach enlightenment until all other beings have also done so. There are ten stages which a bodhisattva goes through until reaching complete enlightenment.
3. The Buddha's teachings can be divided into three main streams called the turning of the three wheels of dharma. The first is called the Hinayana which are the teachings of the Four Noble Truths and meditation and developing an understanding of the emptiness of self. The second is the Mahayana teachings which involve the study of emptiness of phenomena and practicing the bodhisattva path. The third turning involves understanding that everything is not completely empty, but there is also Buddha-nature that pervades all sentient beings.
4. The two truths are the relative or conventional truth which is the solid world that we as ordinary beings see around us and the ultimate truth which one perceives upon reaching enlightenment. For more see note 10.
5. The word for meditation in Tibetan is *sgom* pronounced "gom" and the word for "getting used to" or "habituated" or "cultivating" is *goms* pronounced "khom." One can see the words are very similar.
6. The deer park in which the Buddha gave his first sermon in which he explained the four noble truths is located in modern day Sarnath which is located four miles north of the city of Varanasi in India. The deer park actually comes from a story of the Buddha who was a Banyan deer in a previous life. Thrangu Rinpoche has built a monastery overlooking this park.
7. This may seem to be a contradiction with the statement that Buddhist don't believe in supplicating a god. Buddhist believe that there are gods in that there are deities which were created

by mind. But unlike theistic religions Buddhist do not believe these deities created the universe and that these deities cannot affect your individual karma by rewarding and punishing you.

8. These five were Kaundinya, Ashvajit, Baspa, Mahanaman, and Bhadrika.
9. Rajagriha is located about sixty-two miles south east of the modern city of Patna and still is called Rajagriha and is a holy Buddhist site. Vulture Peak at Rajgir where the Buddha first taught the teachings on emptiness was the heart of the Magadha empire of the Buddha's time. Vulture's Peak (Gridhrakuta) was a place that the Buddha often visited and can be visited even today. The monastery of Jivakamravana that the Buddha visited has been recently excavated. At Rajagriha there are two natural caves where the Buddha lived.
10. Buddhist believe that the world as we see it is not the true nature of phenomena, but rather like an illusion. A Western example would be that we could go up to a red brick wall and hit it. The wall would appear to be solid and made of a single material of hardened clay. This would be its conventional appearance. However, a physicist would tell us that actually the wall made of billions of atoms that are moving at incredible speeds and the spaces between these atoms is so great that the "wall" is actually 99.99% space. It only appears red because human eyes see the radiation coming from these moving atoms as being "red." So we can say the apparent nature of the wall is that it is solid and red while its true nature is more like billions of silicon and oxygen atoms flying around. Buddhist about 1,500 years ago examining phenomena explained this in terms of saying that all outside matter and internal thoughts were "empty" (Skt. *shunyata*) in that they did not appear as they really are. Thrangu Rinpoche often gives the example of the great meditator Milarepa who completely realized this emptiness and was then able to do such things as put his hand right through solid rock. This feat, incidentally, has been replicated in the last ten years by the Seventeenth Karmapa who heads the Kagyu lineage.
11. When the Buddha taught, his teachings were according to legend attended by non-humans as well as humans. Dakas are male and dakinis are female wisdom beings. Many great meditators have received visits especially from dakinis who transmitted special knowledge about practices to them.

12. An important part of Vajrayana practice is visualizing deities that represent aspects of the mind. For example, one would visualize Avalokiteshvara, the deity of perfect compassion, to develop one's compassion. This is the generation stage and then at the end of the practice one would dissolve the deity into oneself to show that this enlightened quality is actually within our mind (but presently covered or obscured).
13. When the Buddha was seventy-nine years old he was accompanied by Ananda and visited several places including Nalanda and stopped at a mango grove in Vaisali. He was taken ill and decided to die in exactly three months. He gradually went to Kushinigar and there he laid down in the "lion's position" and passed away at the age of eighty. He had taught for forty-five years and his last words were, "Decay is inherent in all component beings. Work out you own salvation with diligence."

    Kushinigar where the Buddha died can also be visited. The ruins of Kushinagara are situated near the town of Kasia twenty-two miles north-east of Deoria in Uttar Pradesh in India. This place has two large Buddhist monasteries located where the Buddha passed away and was cremated. One stupa where the Buddha passed away has been excavated and restored several times and contained a number of relics. There are also eight excavated monasteries nearby. Where the Buddha was cremated is a stupa about fifty feet high.

Glossary

absolute level There are two truths or views of reality—relative truth which is seeing things as ordinary beings do with the dualism of "I" and "other" and absolute truth, also called ultimate truth, which is transcending duality and seeing things as they are.

anuttara-yoga-tantra There are four levels of the vajrayana and annutara tantra is the highest of these. It contains the Guhyasamaja, the Chakrasamvara, the Hevajra, and the Kalachakra tantras. See tantras, types.

arhat Accomplished hinayana practitioners who have eliminated the disturbing emotions. They are the fully realized Hinayana practitioners.

bodhisattva An individual who is committed to the Mahayana path of practicing compassion and the six paramitas in order to achieve Buddhahood and free all beings from samsara. More specifically, those with a motivation to achieve liberation from samsara and are on one of the ten bodhisattva levels that culminates in Buddhahood.

bodhisattva levels (Skt. *bhumi*) The levels or stages a bodhisattva goes through to reach enlightenment. These consist of ten levels in the sutra tradition and thirteen in the tantra tradition.

Buddha-nature (Skt. *tathagatagarbha*) The original nature present in all beings which when realized leads to enlightenment. It is also called the Buddha essence.

carya-tantra One of the four tantras emphasizing meditation and external rituals.

completion stage In the vajrayana there are two stages of meditation: the development and the completion stage. The completion stage is a method of trantric meditation in which one attains bliss, clarity, and non-thought by means of the subtle channels and energies within the body.

dharma This has two main meanings: Any truth such as the sky is blue and secondly, as used in this text, the teachings of the Buddha (also called buddha-dharma).

emptiness (Skt. *shunyatai*) Also translated as voidness. The Buddha taught in the second turning of the wheel of dharma that external phenomena and the internal phenomena or concept of self or "I" have no real existence and therefore are "empty."

five paths Traditionally, a practitioner goes through five stages or paths to enlightenment. These are (1) The path of accumulation which emphasizes purifying one's obscurations and accumulating merit. (2) The path of junction or application in which the meditator develops profound understanding of the four noble truths and cuts the root to the desire realm. (3) The path of insight or seeing in which the meditator develops greater insight and enters the first bodhisattva level. (4) The path of meditation in which the meditator cultivates insight in the second through tenth bodhisattva levels. (5) The path of fulfillment which is the complete attainment of Buddhahood.

Four Noble Truths The Buddha began teaching with a talk in India at Sarnath on the four noble truths. These are the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path. These truths are the foundation of Buddhism, particularly the Theravada path.

generation stage In the vajrayana there are two stages of meditation: the development and the completion stage. This is a method of tantric meditation that involves visualization and contemplating deities for the purpose of realizing the purity of all phenomena. In this stage visualization of the deity is established and maintained.

god realm See six realms of samsara.

Hinayana Literally, the "lesser vehicle." The term refers to the first teachings of the Buddha which emphasized the careful examination of mind and its confusion. Also known as the Theravada path.

interdependent origination The principal that nothing exists independently, but comes into existence only in dependence on various previous causes and conditions. There are twelve successive phases of this process that begin with ignorance and end with old age and death.

karma (Literally "action." Karma is a universal law that when one does a wholesome action one's circumstances will improve and when one does an unwholesome action negative results will eventually occur from the act.

Karmapa The title of seventeen successive incarnations of Dusum Khyenpa who has headed the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism.

klesha See disturbing emotions.

kriya tantra One of the four tantras which emphasizes personal purity.

lion's posture The posture the Buddha took when he died. It is laying on his right side (because of how the bodily energies work it would be the left side for women) with the clasped together (and in prayer) and placed under the head. Many lama sleep in this posture each night.

lower realm These are the animal, the hungry ghost, and the hell realms. See six realms of samsara.

Mahayana Literally, the "great vehicle." These are the teachings of the second turning of the wheel of dharma, which emphasize shunyata, compassion, and universal Buddha- nature.

mara Difficulties encountered by the practitioner. There are four kinds—skandha-mara which is incorrect view of self, klesha-mara which is being overpowered by negative emotions, mrityu-mara which is death and interrupts spiritual practice, and devaputra-mara which is becoming stuck in the bliss that comes from meditation.

nirvana Literally, "extinguished." Individuals live in samsara and with spiritual practice can attain a state of enlightenment in which all false ideas and conflicting emotions have been extinguished. This is called nirvana.

Padmasambhava (Tib. *Guru Rinpoche*) He was invited to Tibet in the ninth century C.E. and is known for pacifying the nonBuddhist forces and founding the Nyingma lineage.

paramitas, six Sanskrit for "perfections" and the Tibetan literally means "gone to the other side." These are the six practices of the mahayana path: Transcendent generosity (dana), transcendent discipline (shila), transcendent patience (kshanti), transcendent exertion (virya), transcendent meditation (dhyana), and transcendent knowledge (prajna). The ten paramitas are these plus skillful means, aspirational prayer, power, and pure wisdom (Tib. yeshe).

relative level (Tib. *kunsop*) There are two truths: relative and absolute. Relative truth is the perception of an ordinary (unenlightened) person who sees the world with all his or her projections based on the false belief in self.

samsara Conditioned existence of ordinary life in which suffering occurs because one still possesses attachment, aggression, and ignorance. It is contrasted to nirvana.

Sakya Pandita A hereditary head of the Sakya lineage. A great scholar (1181-1251 C.E.) who was an outspoken opponent of the Kagyu teachings. He also became head of the Tibetan state under the authority of the Mongol emperors.

six realms of samsara These are the possible types of rebirths for beings in samsara and are: the god realm in which gods have great pride, the asura realm in which the jealous gods try to maintain what they have, the human realm which is the best realm because one has the possibility of achieving enlightenment, the animal realm characterized by stupidity, the hungry ghost realm characterized by great craving, and the hell realm characterized by aggression.

skillful means On the mahayana level, this is one of the ten paramitas and refers to dedicating the merits of all one's deeds to the benefit of all sentient beings. On the vajrayana level, it refers to practices of the internal yogas, which manipulate the internal energies and channels.

sutra These are the hinayana and mahayana texts which are the words of the Buddha. These are often contrasted with the tantras which are the Buddha's Vajrayana teachings and the shastras which are commentaries on the words of the Buddha.

tantra One can divide Tibetan Buddhism into the sutra tradition and the tantra tradition. The sutra tradition primarily involves the academic study of the Mahayana sutras and the tantric path primarily involves practicing the Vajrayana practices. The tantras are primarily the texts of the Vajrayana practices.

Tushita This is one of the heaven fields of the Buddha. Tushita is in the sambhogakaya and therefore is not located in any place or time.

wheel of dharma The Buddha's teachings correspond to three levels: the Hinayana, the Mahayana and the Vajrayana with each set being one turning of the wheel.

yana Literally means vehicle but refers here to level of teaching. There are three main yanas (see Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana)

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